A POKER HAND AND A HOODOO

Two Questions Which Mr. Edward Cunniff, Mississippi River Gambler, Never Settled.

Mr. Edward Cunniff sat on a campstool under an awning on the after deck of his houseboat, the Sally, shortly after noon of the day following the arrival of the boat at Cape Girardeau. One who looked at him closely might have thought that he had no greater immediate anxiety in life than that which was involved in the effort he was making to improve the appearance of his finger nails.

As a matter of fact he was working with scrupulous care toward the achievement of that end, using no implement but a penknife blade with a razor edge, but using that with great deftness. His manner of sitting was curious, for he had the campstool tilted on its two hinder legs, but his feet were extended forward, and the weight of his body was thus supported in a way that made it almost impossible for him to sit upright.

It was therefore not surprising that he should have failed to notice the approach of another man, who had come aboard at the bow of the boat and was walking toward him with noiseless steps.

Mr. Cunniff, although apparently intent on his manicuring, was really performing that operation mechanically, while he was pondering a problem in draw poker which had presented itself in the play of the night before, and which he had not solved to his complete satisfaction at the time it arose. Draw poker was far more than a pastime to Mr. Cunniff. It was, in fact, the source on which he relied for the greater part of the income which he found indispensable to the enjoyment of those luxuries to which he had grown accustomed.

It was therefore a manifest necessity for Mr. Cunniff to have something more than an academic knowledge of the game. That he thoroughly understood the percentages of chance in the deal and the question of odds in the betting may be assume without violence to the probabilities, but so much knowledge as that was shared by many of the people with whom he played from time to time, and if his own skill as a player had had no broader, surer foundation than that, he would hardly have enjoyed the income he did.

Moreover, he would not have been able to purchase and fit up his houseboat as comfortably as he had done. And so he would not have been enabled to cruise up and down the Mississippi as he did, stopping at this place and that, at his convenience, till he exhausted the possibilities of gain at each place.

This broader, surer foundation for his system of play had come from much careful study. The devotion of many hours a day to practice in the manipulation of playing cards had resulted in developing a dexterity that was almost marvellous, but mere manual dexterity was not sufficient to insure him that superiority which he counted essential.

The more delicate questions of finesse in the actual backing of such hands as he might chance to hold occupied his attention during much of the time when he was seemingly engrossed, as he happened to be at the moment when this other man approached him, with some comparatively trifling matter.

At a critical moment in the game of the preceding night he had stood pat on two pairs, believing that he had discovered the psychological moment at which his opponent would be impressed with the danger of opposing a pat hand. There had been some raising before the draw, and he had played boldly, raising back the second time, and assuming an expression of vast content when the other man simply made good.

When he stood pat after this preliminary betting Clay Pearsall, who was the other man in question, had studied for a long time before calling for cards, but after deliberating had called for two. It was reasonably apparent, therefore, that he had three of a kind, and Mr. Cunniff perceived that it was up to him to carry out his bluff. And not only that, but it devolved upon him to make his play in such fashion that it could not be construed as a bluff.

There was something over $200 in the pot when Mr. Pearsall threw in his white chip after the draw. The others had dropped out already, so that the bet passed to Mr. Cunniff next, and he had to decide what sized bet would seem the most like an invitation to call. If he should bet too much it would be construed as a bluff—and if too little, it would be evidence of weakness. He put up $100.

The mere fact that he was called was not, in his judgment, any serious reflection on his own play, but what disquieted him greatly was the fact that Pearsall had called him quickly, eagerly and joyously.

This appeared to be proof positive that Pearsall, who had not the reputation of being a particularly astute player, had seen through his play, and this was not only mortifying, but alarming. It was true that Mr. Cunniff had resorted to mechanical expedients in the course of the next few deals, and had recouped himself for his loss, besides accumulating a handsome profit on the evening's session, but the open question presented by his defeat in that particular hand was one that called for study.

He was enough of an artist to prefer playing without resort to manipulation of the deck, though he had no compunction about winning by any means within his power, and what he was studying was the playing of that one hand.

In what way should he have declared——

Crack!

Mr. Cunniff sprang to his feet with almost inconceivable speed, and before he had fairly straightened up had his revolver in his hand, cocked and poised for a shot. His pearl handled penknife lay on the deck.

Ten feet away from him stood Clay Pearsall, wringing his right hand with his left in a curious way, while his revolver lay on the deck at some distance from him. Evidently he was not dangerous at the moment, and Cunniff was not in the habit of wasting shots. He paused, not understanding the situation for a moment.

"Lucky for you, Ed, that I happened to look out the window when I did" said a voice behind him, and he looked around to see Jim Partland, one of his adherents, leaning across the windowsill of one of the cabins. He also held a revolver in his hand, and the smoke was still curling out from its muzzle.

"So it was you that shot," said Cunniff.

"Yes, but it would ha' been that skunk there in another second. He was aiming at you."

"Why didn't you kill him?"

Partland shrugged his shoulders.

"'Peare to me that's your job," he said. "I reckoned I was doin' enough when I shot the gun outen his hand. It was you he was goin' to shoot, not me."

"I reckon you're right, Jim," said Cunniff. Then, turning to the other man, he said, "Well?"

"Well," said Pearsall, sullenly "I got sober this morning an' I come to understand a heap more about that game o' poker last night nor I did then. The way I figgered it there ain't room for us two on this river."

"Well, I reckon you're another one that's about right," said Cunniff, and without more ado he leaped at the other, and with one blow of his left fist, sent him reeling over the low bulwark of the boat and splashing into the river.

He sank but almost immediately rose again and struck out like a strong swimmer. The swift current carried him down stream irresistibly, but it looked entirely possible for him to reach the shore at some point further down if he should not tire out in the struggle.

"Better shoot him, Ed," advised Partland, as the two watched the swimmer, and Cunniff raised his revolver.

After hesitating a moment, however, Cunniff put it back in his pocket.

"I can't do it," he said. "I never shot a man in my life that had no chance. Let him drown."

"Your funeral," said Partland, deeply disgusted. "That skunk was goin' to do you all right. More'n that, it's the worst kind of a hoodoo to spare a man's life that tries to kill you. I reckon you'd oughter know that, 'thout me tellin' you."

"Anybody knows that," said a third man, who came sauntering up, evidently attracted by the noise of the pistol shot, but in no way excited, even by the sight of Mr. Clay Pearsall splashing in the river. It was not his fight, and he was as indifferent as Partland.

Sam Sperry was a worthy member of the trio. No more experienced gamblers, no cooler hands in times of excitement than these three were to be found on the river, and if he and Partland deferred to Cunniff in all matters where leadership seemed necessary, it was because of his better business ability. Money that they two made melted away, but Cunniff kept his, and by using it astutely made opportunities for all of them. Their footing on Cunniff's boat was that of permanent guests.

"I've heard o' that hoodoo," said Cunniff, slowly. He was noted for his deliberation. "But I reckon there ain't no hobdoo that's worse 'n shootin' a man when he ain't got no chance to shoot back."

"That's what that geezer was doin' to you, on'y for me seein' him when I did," said Partland.

"Yes, I owe you one for that, Jim," said Cunniff, "and I'm not liable to forget it, but you see how the hoodoo worked on him. It was some quick. I reckon he must be drownded by this time."

They all looked down on the river, but there was nothing to be seen of the swimmer, and they fell to talking of other matters. The incident was apparently closed. The crew of the houseboat had watched the proceedings almost from the first, but they were too well trained to go aft, excepting under orders, and what comments they made were not audible.

There was reason to suppose that another game of poker would be played on the Sally that night, the population of Cape Girardeau being well informed of the general purpose of the owner of the boat in stopping when he had. It was, however, a matter of some surprise when half a dozen men, singly and in pairs, paddled their skiffs alongside the Sally before nightfall, and without great ceremony made their way aboard.

They had little to say, though they responded, readily enough, to Cunniff's invitation to sample some really superior corn juice which he had in the sideboard. They were also responsive to the suggestion of a little draw, but a difficulty presented itself. Nine were too many to play at one table, and hardly enough for two games.

Cunniff, however, was vaguely uneasy, and making a pretence of busying himself about the boat managed to get Partland and Sperry playing at different tables, each with three of the strangers, while he went outside the cabin.

The dusk was deepening as he peered out over the river, and seeing two more skiffs coming toward him he called up the mate of the Sally and gave him a sharp order.

"Hoist anchor as quick an' as quiet as you can, an' cut these skiffs all loose. Let her drift, an' we'll take chances. When these two skiffs come up, don't let 'em alongside If there's any trouble I'll be out here quick enough." Then, knowing that the mate was to be relied upon, he returned to the cabin, outwardly as placid as usual.

Inside all was quiet. The two games were in full progress, and he watched, first one and then the other, as if in doubt which one he desired to join. Apparently he had not yet decided when there was the noise of voices outside.

It did not escape his notice that the six strangers looked at one another as if they had been expecting the arrival of others. They played on, stolidly, however, and he turned without a word and went on deck.

Here he found the two skiffs alongside, with the mate ordering them off, and a tall, husky looking countryman demanding peremptorily to be allowed on board.

"I'm the Sheriff o' this county, Jim Baisley," he said, "an' I p'pose to come aboard forcible if I ain't let come peaceable."

"Come right aboard, Sheriff," said Cunniff. "I reckon we ain't strong enough to keep you off if we wanted to, seein' you've got six o' your men here now."

"Well, that's right, I reckon," said the Sheriff. "They 'm a leetle ahead o' time, but they was to come." Then, when he had stepped aboard, he said: "What do you mean by driftin' down stream like this? D'you know your anchor was up?"

"Yes, I knew it. I kind o' reckoned on gettin' out o' the county afore you'd get here," said Cunniff, quietly.

"Well, you didn't. Now I want to know about Clay Pearsall, a citizen o' Cape Girardeau that's quite some thought of. Hestarted for your boat this noon. Leastways he was seen paddlin' this way, an' he hain't been seen since. His skiff was picked up below here an' his hat was found in the river. You know him. He was playin' cards here last night."

"There was a gentleman was playin' here last night, that called here to-day," said Cunniff quietly. "He come aboard sort o' sneaky like an' there was a little conversation an' he went away."

"Was there a fight?" demanded the Sheriff.

"Well, no, you wouldn't call it a fight. There was on'y one shot fired an' nobody hit. He just went away."

Mr. Cunniff's habitual deliberation served him well as he talked, for he delayed matters until Partland and Sperry had ranged themselves beside him. They and the six strangers had left the card tables and come on deck, scenting trouble. Behind the three stood the mate and two deckhands, all silent, but alert and evidently ready to receive orders.

"Well, I reckon you'll have to come with me, Cunniff," said the Sheriff. "'Tain't altogether clear about Clay Pearsall, an' you'd better make your explanations in court."

"Maybe you've got another reckon comin'," said Cunniff. "We're on the county line by this time, an' there's no more'n any other man here. I don't p'pose to leave my boat."

"Well, we're strong enough to make you," said the Sheriff, drawing his revolver, a motion which was imitated on the instant by all the men in his party.

Mr. Partland's most prominent characteristic was his promptness It had its advantages as well as its disadvantages, but one of his maxims was that if a man's going to shoot he'd ought to shoot first. Accordingly he fired point blank at the Sheriff, who thereupon ceased to take notice.

The inevitable result was a volley directed at Partland, but Cunniff with a leap sprang directly in front of his friend, saying, "Oh! Jim, Jim!"

Then, as he fell, riddled with bullets, he said, "I told you I wouldn't forget I owed you one, old man." But more than this he could not say.

Mr. Partland's grief was great and sincere. "I told you the hoodoo would work, Ed," he exclaimed as he bent over his friend. But neither he nor any of the others offered further resistance as they were placed under arrest by the Sheriff's posse.

And the next day Clay Pearsall appeared in Cape Girardeau, having swam ashore in safety, wherefore the question of hoodoos is still involved in considerable doubt in the minds of those who know all the facts.

Use of Veneer in Furniture Making.

From the Baltimore American.

"It may not be generally known," said J. B. Elderson of Michigan, "but there is to-day scarcely a piece of furniture is made that is not veneered. This is not altogether due to the high cost of fine woods, such as birdseye maple, mahogany, redwood and other varieties, which has a great deal to do with it, but owing to it being difficult to get a piece of wood of sufficient size that will not split, making unsightly fissures.

"In making piano tops, for example, four or five layers of pine or poplar are laid with the grain running different and then glued together under heavy pressure. Then, when the veneer is firmly glued to this, the whole makes up in such a manner that the piece will withstand almost any kind of climate without warping or cracking.

"This is true, not only of the finer woods, but also of oak, which is so prone to what we call 'wind splitting,' and for that reason all modern oak furniture is veneered."

WICKEDNESS OF THE FROZEN UP OYSTERMAN

And the Wickeder Man Who Thrived on It Till He Tried to Become a Trust.

CRISFIELD, Md., Feb. 18.—It is long since Chesapeake oystermen have seen the shallows of the bay frozen tight and the oyster beds sealed up with ice for two winters in succession. Hard and long continued frosts in this region mean distress and sometimes ruin to the oystermen, both employers and employed.

All through the oyster season, when the water is open, the gray of early dawn sees hundreds of tongers sailing out of this landlocked little harbor to tong in the shallows of Tangier Sound. The long line of little canoes and bugeyes slowly trailing out to the oyster grounds in the early morning makes even this unlovely little town picturesque.

What goes on here is to be seen in twenty other little harbors—at Cambridge, at the neighboring harbor of Oxford, in inlets and creeks all about Deal's Island and Hooper's Straits, and in the Virginia harbors of Onancock and Lewisetta and the beautiful St. Mary's River on the western shore of Maryland. Now the oyster fleets are frozen in at all these harbors and may have weeks of idleness.

Time was when the enforced presence of an idle oyster fleet in any harbor was a cause of alarm to orderly citizens and a source of real danger in sparsely settled regions. The Chesapeake still reeks with stories of Lewisetta near the mouth of the Potomac.

Season after season it was just such a hell on earth upon a small scale as the malodorous Suez or the once terrible Sandy Point, at the southern extremity of South America. Lewisetta took its name from a man, since sent to jail, who was famous throughout the Chesapeake for his sudden wealth

He set up a general store in the little Virginia harbor of Coan River, a favorite resort for oystermen who worked the rich deposits near the mouth of the Potomac. He would buy anything or sell anything. He sold supplies of every kind to the hundreds of oyster men who frequented the harbor. Above all, he sold them whiskey.

He bought and sold muskrat skins, terrapin, game of all kinds, oysters, fish, what you will. He gave dances, he had a place where oystermen off duty could have a quiet little game. In this lonely spot there were barbaric suppers with terrapin and champagne.

The oysterman with a full pocket is a prodigal soul, and Lewis knew how to draw money from all he met. He was generous enough himself in a calculating way.

Lewisetta speedily became a scandal to the region; and Sunday, when the oystermen did not work, was dreaded by the orderly portion of the small community, while the enforced idleness consequent upon continued hard frost was contemplated with horror. Lewis was making money fast in half a dozen ways, but he was not satisfied; he went into oystering, and speedily owned many oyster boats.

Then he bought steamboats, until he had a fleet of them. But good luck seemed to drive him mad. He had won the greater part of his wealth from the patronage of the oystermen. In an evil hour he forgot this, and actually endeavored to seize and convert into his own private property one of the richest natural oyster deposits near the harbor.

That was enough; the word was passed round, and his former patrons ceased to deal with him. A rival store was set up, and to this they transferred their trade. After that ruin speedily followed for Lewis, and upon a charge of arson he was finally sent to prison.

But his works survive him. A hundred stories of violence, robbery, even murder, are told of the lonely little harbor as it was at the height of his prosperity and power. The name still remains to the place, and although it is seventy miles from the nearest railway station in Virginia and eighteen or twenty miles across the bay from the nearest in Maryland, it is still a prosperous little oystering village.

It was not very many years back that Lewis flourished, but the oyster men are far less dreaded now than then. You still hear tales of the shanghaied wretch, who is worked all winter and turned loose in the spring with frosted hands and feet and empty pockets; but instances of the kind are rare.

If you board a train at Philadelphia bound for Baltimore you may see, in charge of half a dozen ill dressed young men from the slums, a sinister looking fellow, who takes his convoy to the smoking car, where he hands each a bottle of vile whiskey. They arrive at Baltimore in a drunken stupor, and wake next morning aboard an oysterman well down the Chesapeake. That is the present method of shanghaiing for the Chesapeake oyster fleet.

If the men can stand hard work and exposure they are likely to come through the winter with nothing worse than chilblains, and not without money. As a matter of fact, the natives do the greater part of the oystering in the Chesapeake, and they are less to be feared than the semi-vagabond from the slums of a great town when an oyster fleet is frozen up in a small harbor.

Many of the natives leave their boats with caretakers and go home when the ice prevents tonging. Of course there is a sudden demand for strong drink in any harbor where an oyster fleet is frozen up, and the prohibition laws which prevail in some Eastern Shore counties are then sorely tried. Trade in other lines also improves, for not only have the men to be fed, but those of them who have a few dollars in pocket spend it freely for all sorts of things that the shops sell.

The Bowery itself cannot show a livelier scene than that which may be witnessed in this town night after night in the oyster season. By the flare of pitiless, bright electric lights the shaggy crowd that packs the long narrow auction room is picturesque beyond almost anything east of the Rockies, and in the presence of such a scene the business street of Crisfield, with its railroad tracks down the centre and its row of wooden stores on either side, looks more than ever like the sole thoroughfare of a new far Western mining town.

In that double row of shabby shops the frozen in oysterman can buy anything that he cares to have, from an oil skin or an anchor to a gold watch or a muskrat skin overcoat, and somewhere in town he can find almost any form of amusement that his heart desires. Fights are frequent, and gambling is rife among the rival oystermen, but it is evidence of the improved conditions prevailing in the fleet that serious crimes of violence are few.

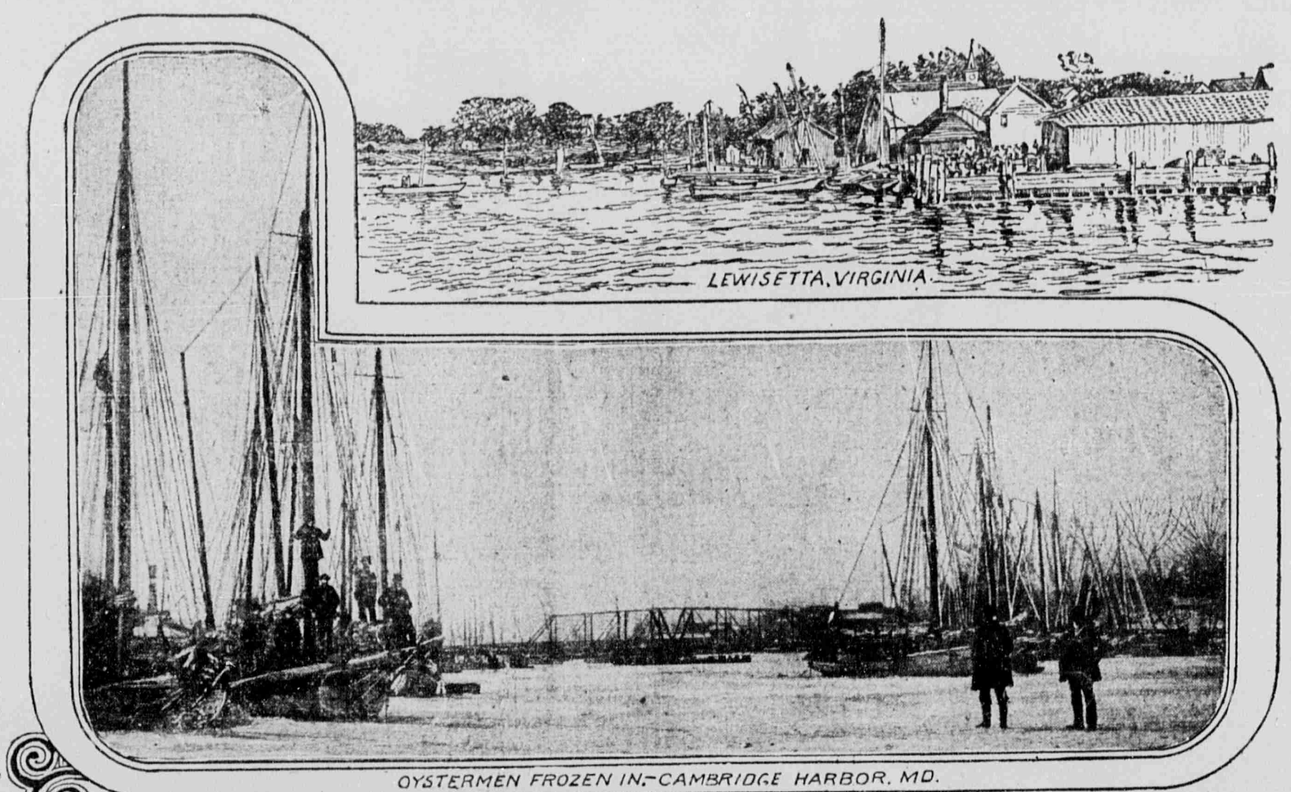
The laid up oysterman finds some employment for leisure in repairing boats and implements. It is a sight to delight the heart of one who likes to see a fine handicraft deftly plied to look on when a big bugeye is to receive a new mast. The long, raking stick is shaped and trimmed perhaps before the eyes of the onlooker, and then is stepped and stayed with amazing skill and speed as the vessel lies at anchor among fifty or more of her own kind packed like the traditional sardines.

Ten days of hard frost means a loss of many thousands of dollars to the oystermen, a stoppage of wages in scores of oyster packing houses and forced economies for a year to come among the families of the oystermen. And the loss is never made up, for, while the enforced rest of the oystermen may give the oyster beds a chance to recuperate, the opening of the water will bring out more tongers than ever, and if the beds show increased richness at the opening of the next season the number of licensed tongers will further increase.

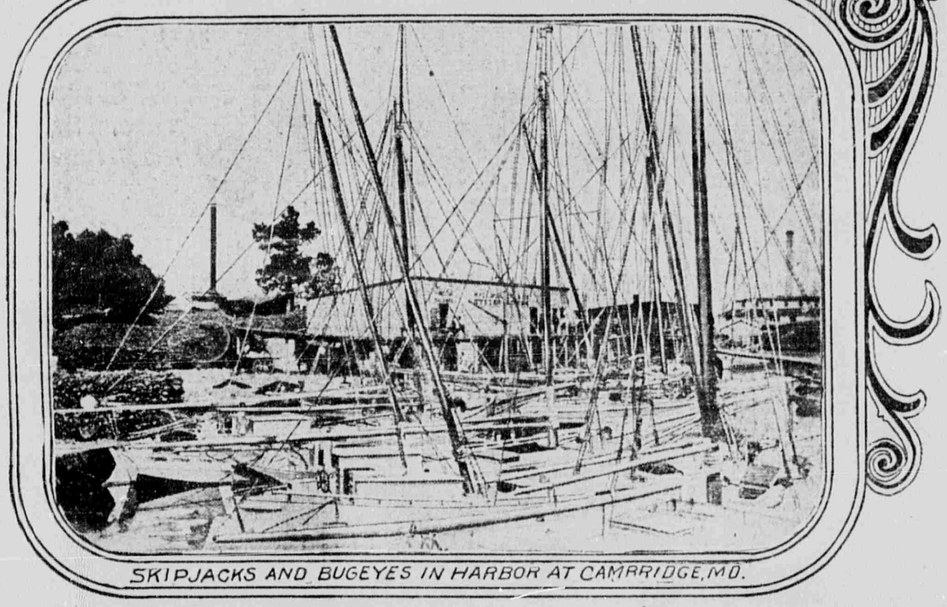
What a long period of hard frost means to the Chesapeake region may be guessed from the general conditions of the tonging business in these waters. It is a toss-up with many a man whether he shall farm the soil or the sea. Many do both.

Every dweller upon tidal water in these parts has a boat than can be used at a pinch for oystering in a small way. He can hire a boy of fifteen at 50 cents a day as a helper, buy with small outlay the necessary implements of the trade, pay the trifling tonger's license fee, and appear a fully equipped oysterman. Perhaps within sight of his house are natural oyster deposits open to all licensed tongers of the county, and the market is likely to lie within a few minutes' sail.

The hard freeze not only ties up fleets of tongers in the harbors, but also stops this strictly domestic trade. Little bugeyes and narrow, sharp canoes lie frozen tightly within view of every farmhouse and cabin, and hundreds of households have to forego the two, three or five dollars a day that the tonger in a small way may hope to earn.



OYSTERMEN FROZEN IN—CAMBRIDGE HARBOR, MD.



SKIPJACKS AND BUGEYES IN HARBOR AT CAMBRIDGE, MD.

Do Sharks Bite? "Yes," Says Cuba

BARACOA, Cuba, Feb. 18.—Two Harvard athletes were standing on the deck of a steamship as she lay at anchor in this harbor. The water was calm and still, not a ripple showing on its surface. One of the athletic passengers as he gazed longingly over the side remarked to the purser:

"By Jove, it wouldn't take more than one peseta to induce me to jump overboard and take a swim."

The purser smiled.

"You'd never live to tell the tale," he replied.

"Why not?"

"Because you'd make just about one square meal for a maneater."

"Nonsense!"

While the subject was being discussed the would-be swimmer's companion, who was walking aft on the port side, suddenly stopped and shouted:

"Look at that."

About fifty feet away from the stern of the steamer there was a distinct ripple. In a moment the dorsal fin of a huge shark appeared above the water, cutting it like a knife.

He was not alone. In the space of fifteen minutes the three men saw no fewer than seven sharks, ranging in length, as nearly as could be judged by the eye, from 8 to 15 feet.

The man who a few minutes before had expressed a desire to take a bath turned to the purser. He shivered as he spoke:

"Did I say that I would like to jump overboard?"

"You most certainly did."

"Well, sir, I want to say to you right now that all the money in Cuba—and you can add the Standard Oil Company—wouldn't tempt me to put my little finger in that water."

Will sharks attack a man? Every Cuban smiles significantly when this question is asked him. The following stories are all vouched for. They are well authenticated and many witnesses testify to their truth.

Last August a German bark was lying in the harbor of Caibarien. The captain started off to board her in a small sailboat, accompanied by two of the vessel's crew.

Half way out the boat was struck by one of the sudden squalls so common in those waters and capsized. The three men all bed up on the bottom of the boat, the captain lying along the keel and the two sailors next to him.

Before they could be taken off by a fishing boat that was within two hundred yards of where the accident occurred sharks had grabbed the two sailors off the bottom of the boat. The captain was saved, but the shock was so great that he became a complete mental wreck.

Last September the steamer Mobila was lying in the harbor of Havana. The ship was about to get under way and two of the sailors were down on the companion ladder prepaing to haul it up when one of them lost his footing and slipped into the water.

His partner caught him by the hand, but before he could get him out of danger a huge shark took off the man's left leg just below the knee, and then another shark grabbed the other leg and bit it off above the other knee. The sailor was taken aboard, and died in fifteen minutes.

During the Spanish war an American transport was lying in the harbor of Nuevitas. There were five American soldiers on board, who were to be taken back as prisoners to the States.

Late in the afternoon they endeavored to make their escape by swimming ashore, a distance of a few hundred feet. Only one reached the shore. The others were quickly devoured, the water being stained with blood in circles of twenty-five feet.

The ferocity of the Cuban sharks is almost beyond belief. It is a great mistake to suppose that it is necessary for a shark to turn on his back in order to swallow. It is easy to prove this.

Some pieces of meat were thrown overboard to several of these maneaters as they cruised around the stern of a steamer here. One of them turned over, but the others did not. They swam over the morsel, distended their jaws and swallowed it without an apparent effort. The jaws of a 15-foot shark when fully distended can be put over a man's body and will slip over his shoulders like a barrel hoop.

It is not uncommon for a shark to jump out of the water after his prey. One of the most terrible instances of a shark's ferocity took place last summer in the harbor of Cardenas.

The captain of a Norwegian bark had taken his wife ashore, and returning to his vessel was assisting her from the sailboat to the companion ladder. There was quite a sea running, and it took some agility to get from the boat to the ladder.

The captain went first and then held out his hand to his wife. Her foot slipped and she fell into the bay. As her husband raised her up, both of her legs were taken off by a shark lying in wait.

The suddenness of the attack caused the captain to let her fall back temporarily, and before he could save her she had been carried down and torn to pieces. For a few moments the green water of the bay was discolored with blood, which quickly disappeared, however, and there was no further evidence of the tragedy.

THE VANISHING BOARDING HOUSE

Unusual Experience in a New York Home Conducted on the Installment Plan.

"Did you ever live in one of those disappearing, pay on the installment plan boarding houses?" inquired the man who did not look well nourished. "We did—my wife and I—a few months last year.

"It was an interesting business while it lasted; but I never saw a boarding house, in New York or anywhere else, evaporate like that one did. Vanished in sections, piecemeal. Reminded me a good deal of a change of scenery on the stage, right in the presence of the audience, only, of course, it was a bit more gradual than that.

"The installment plan part of it consisted in the landlady's scheme of collecting the board money. She took it in dimes, quarters, halves, dollars and so on. My wife had to fix up a system of bookkeeping to keep track of it. I never knew how I stood on the board question on pay days until my wife had cast up her books and showed me.

"For example, a pedler would ring the basement bell with an armful of feather dusters. The landlady would need a feather duster, but she never had the price, it seemed. So she'd trip up stairs and swing one of the boarders for a quarter, on account, to buy the duster.

"Or the milkman would drop around with his bill for $1.34. The landlady would tap on the door of a boarder's room and ask him to help her out with the $1.34—she had twelve cents herself and only needed $1.22 to make up the milkman's bill—on account, until settling up day.

"Or she'd race up to our room and say to us breathlessly:

"'I think I'll have to pay the landlord $4 on account this morning—he's been looking grumpily at me for some mornings now as I passed his place on my way to market—and could you let me have the $4, and charge it to our account?'

"Of course we wouldn't mind—when we had the $4—and then the landlady would go and stake the owner or agent of the house to the four tones on rent account and sing happily over the achievement for several days afterward. It was a beautiful arrangement she had with the owner of the house, whatever it was, but somehow we boarders never felt quite certain that we wouldn't be turned into the street some night when the owner of the property got to feeling particularly grumpy.

"On some pay days, when I'd be due to get my board account straightened out, my wife would have to tot up about eighty-seven little items, small digs made during the two weeks by the landlady—we paid every two weeks—the amounts ranging from a few cents to buy copies of the papers to see if her advertisement for boarders was in or a nickel for a bunch of parsley, up to enough dollars to square the gas bill—and she never squared the gas bill till the determined looking chap with the wrench, from the gas office, showed up at the place to cut off the supply of gas.

"But the disappearing part of that layout was what faded us the most. Genuinely puzzling thing, that, until at length—so about the last minute—we found out what it all meant.

"We took lodgings at the house on June 1 last year. The parlor and dining room had a sort of slapped together, only rigged up for a while look, but our room was comfortable and the eating was good enough, and so we stayed along, even when the out fit began to be pulled from under us.

"The parlor began to be skeletonized first, along toward the 15th of September. We didn't feel, any of us boarders, like asking the landlady so direct a question as what the departure of the piano meant, although some of the ragtime vampers missed the instrument quite a lot.

"Then the heavier parlor chairs executed a queer getaway. They were in the parlor when I left for the office one morning, but they were gone when I got home in the evening; and my wife, who doesn't let many occurrences of this sort get by her, hadn't seem them go.

"But gone they were, all right, and inside of a week the only furniture left in the parlor was one old-fashioned cretonne covered chair, one rickety lounge that had apparently been dragged up from the cellar to sort of fill out, and the four large oval pictures of four of the landlady's previous husbands.

"The dining room began to thin out soon after the parlor was gutted.

"But when our room furniture began to disappear, all of us boarders became more or less grouchy. One day while I was at the office and my wife was out, our brass and white bed was replaced by an ancient three-quarter walnut bed.

"My wife spoke about that to the landlady, of course, but the landlady—who, you see, was one of those dear little souls that you couldn't get openly angry with—had some evasive reply, and so we stood for the dinky walnut bed, although the footboard was about seven inches shy of being far enough away from my head to make sleeping in the contraption exactly comfortable.

"About the 25th of November the landlady had the rug in our room taken up during my wife's absence—I was at the office, of course—and a soiled ingrain rug that my wife had seen in the attic was laid down in its place.

"Then—then, we made a stand. All of the boarders, in fact, got together and made a stand. The rooms of the other boarders were being gutted in the same way as ours. But we only got together and made the kick on the day when all of the good rugs were taken out of the rooms and meanlooking, wornout ingrain rugs from the garret put down in their places.

"'Mrs. Ohdear,' I said to the landlady, having been elected spokesman of the kicking boarders, 'I am compelled to inquire what's coming off here, anyhow. I speak for the whole bunch. We feel like we're camping out. How long is this thing going to continue? How do we know that we won't come home some day and find nothing at all left in our rooms? Please put us next.'

"The landlady looked quite grieved, so she did, to find that we had noticed anything, as she expressed it.

"'Perhaps, though,' she said, 'I should have told you that I am going to give up this house on the 1st of December.'

"I agreed with her, remarking that it seemed to me that the boarders were perhaps entitled to something more than twenty minutes notice to look for other quarters.

"'Ye-es,' the landlady went on, 'I think that perhaps I really should have said something about it, now I think of it. You know, I run a boarding house at Lakewood, N. J., during the winter season, and always open it up on the 1st of December. And I've been shipping my furniture down there, you know—a little at a time, so as not to make it noticeable. Dead, I didn't think anybody had noticed it! You must all come down to my place at Lakewood when you can.'

"That's the way the mystery was cleared up. I don't suppose she'd have told us—confident in her belief that we wouldn't notice anything—until the night before the 1st of December.

"No more disappearing boarding houses in mine; it's too dang rous!"

Cent for Every Horseshoe.

From the Kennebec Journal.

Ralph H. Whitney, one of Houlton's enterprising blacksmiths, has a unique method in regard to keeping account of the number of horseshoes he nails on each year.

For every shoe that he places on a horse's hoof he gives his wife one cent, and at the end of the year he can easily tell the exact number. He has followed this method ever since starting in business, and the amount of money which his better half has saved is not small.

In the year 1903 the number of shoes was something like 14,000, and during the year 1904 the whole number was 12,101.